

Venison Processing in Retail Grocery Stores

The Michigan Department of Agriculture Food and Dairy Division licenses and inspects grocery stores to ensure that retail food is safe, unadulterated, and not sold in a fraudulent or deceptive manner. The 1999 Food Code contains specific requirements that retail stores must meet in order to handle hunter taken wild game. Here are some questions and answers about processing wild game in a licensed grocery store.

Why Monitor Hunter Taken Venison Processing?

The discovery of bovine tuberculosis (TB) in wild deer has focused public attention on diseases that have the potential to be transmitted to humans. Research indicates that the risk is low for humans to get bovine TB by eating properly cooked venison.

However, the potential exists for the spread of bacterial contamination within a retail store and to other foods if wild game processing is not conducted under strict procedures that control cross contamination. The specific challenges include:

- Ensuring that game meat is kept strictly separate from the commercial food in the establishment.
- Controlling filth from hides and loose deer hair throughout the store.
- Providing adequate cold storage capacity to maintain carcasses and meat at 41 F. or below in order to limit bacterial growth.
- Having sanitation procedures in place to assure all common areas and equipment are cleaned & sanitized before and after wild game processing.

All foods processed in an MDA licensed establishment must be handled in a safe and sanitary manner, whether it's commercial food or wild game intended for the hunter.

What are the Guidelines for Safely Processing Venison at Retail Grocery Stores?

In 1998, MDA and Michigan State University collaborated on developing a set of "retail food establishment venison processing guidelines". The guidelines were distributed through mailings and by the inspectors during their field visits to retail stores throughout the state. The guidelines are included in this packet for your use.

What is the Variance Requirement?

The Food Code (Section 3-502.11) states that a food establishment must obtain a **variance** from MDA before custom processing wild game. By tracking the stores that process wild game through this variance, MDA can assure that venison processing is carried out safely across the state and that controls are in place to reduce the risk of cross contamination. A simple "Variance Request Form" has been developed to assist store owners in obtaining the variance.

What Do I Need to Do to Meet the Variance Requirement for Custom Processing Venison in my Grocery Store?

- 1. Meet the *sanitation requirements*** of the 1999 Food Code. The pertinent sanitation requirements are outlined and included in this packet.
- 2. Document your procedure** by detailing the step-by-step handling of wild game in your store from receiving through finished product delivery. You may use the *Retail Food Establishment Venison Processing Guidelines* for your procedure if you follow them and indicate additional steps you use. This is the minimum requirement. Operators should develop more detailed documents if their processing drastically varies from the guidelines or uses food processes such as curing & smoking the venison meat .
- 3. Submit the variance request form** to your inspector or regional MDA office. A list of regional office addresses and phone numbers are included with the guidelines.

What will inspectors look for at my store?

MDA food inspectors may conduct an inspection of your store during the venison processing season. The inspector will determine if you are following the sanitation requirements in the Food Code. The inspector will also check if your venison handling procedures are documented, meet the safety requirements, and are being followed.

If the inspector determines that major deviations exist in your procedures, corrective action or additional documentation may be required such as a complete HACCP plan.

I have more questions, who do I contact?

A list of regional office addresses and phone numbers are included with the *venison processing guidelines*. You can contact the nearest office and talk with the regional supervisor or your inspector. Your inspector will have information to share about venison processing such as the guidelines and sanitation requirements, and will be able to assist you in submitting your variance request. This information can also be obtained on the MDA web site at www.mda.state.mi.us